



US Army Corps of Engineers
Great Lakes & Ohio River Division

Great Lakes Habitat Initiative

1. **Background.** Over 1,500 people from eight states participated in a one-year effort that culminated on December 12, 2005 with the release of the Strategy for the Protection and Restoration of the Great Lakes. Representing state, local tribal and federal agencies, along with industry, business, and civic groups, these stakeholders joined to form the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration. This Collaboration developed a Strategy that focused on eight priority issues identified by the Great Lakes Governors and Mayors.

2. **Project.** In March 2006 Mr. John P. Woodley, Jr., the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works announced the selection of the Great Lakes Habitat Initiative as the largest of five projects to be funded for analyses of complex water resources issues within large, multijurisdictional watersheds. The Great Lakes Habitat Initiative is a 2-year, \$1 million project will develop an implementation plan for the protection and restoration of wetlands and aquatic habitat that builds upon the recommendations of the Strategy of the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration.

3. **Purpose.** This Initiative will identify site-specific actions that can be implemented under existing funding programs to protect and restore wetlands and aquatic habitat in the Great Lakes region. This project will bridge the gap between the regional needs identified in the Strategy of the Regional Collaboration and the programs that provide funding for “on-the-ground” actions.

Four products will be developed that support the goals of the Initiative:

- a. The first product will be a compilation of information about all existing funding programs that may be used to plan, design, construct, and manage site-specific projects or actions to protect and restore wetlands and aquatic habitat in the Great Lakes region, their program requirements and recent funding history.
- b. The second product will be an inventory of place-based actions to protect and restore coastal wetlands and aquatic habitat in the Great Lakes that have been proposed to federal, state, local, tribal and nongovernmental programs, but not implemented because of funding limitations. These would include actions to acquire and preserve properties with valuable habitat and actions involving construction to restore or enhance degraded habitat. Actions will be reviewed to screen out those no longer applicable, and the information on actions updated to include comparable data on costs and implementability.
- c. The third product will be an analysis of performance measures for prioritizing actions based on their ecological value or benefits. These metrics will enable wetlands and habitat protection and restoration actions to be evaluated based on their merits and identify the actions that can deliver the “best bang for the buck.”

d. The fourth product will be an analysis of some of the potential actions in the inventory, prioritization using the performance metrics, and identification of existing governmental and non-governmental programs that could implement them.

4. **Applications.** The products of this effort may be used for a variety of applications by Great Lakes agencies and organizations. The compilation of information on existing funding programs will enable prospective sponsors or advocates for projects to understand the available funding programs and their requirements. The inventory of proposed actions will enable users to examine proposed actions by type or along political boundaries to identify opportunities for partnerships or select actions that are consistent with their strategic goals. The analysis of performance metrics will foster a common understanding of the measures used for evaluating actions and the weightings applied by the various agencies and organizations to plan and prioritize actions through their respective authorities and funding programs. The last product will provide an example of how actions can be compared, prioritized, and aligned with potential funding programs and authorities.

5. **Limitations.** This project must be completed in less than two years with the budget allocated. In order to work within these constraints, this project will compile and analyze existing, proposed actions for preservation and restoration of coastal wetlands and aquatic habitat, rather than attempting to identify all possible actions.

6. **Participants.** The Corps of Engineers has invited senior managers from eleven agencies and organizations representing federal, state, tribal, and city governments and nongovernmental organizations to participate on the Steering Committee for this Initiative. These agencies and organizations have also been invited to participate on the project delivery team responsible for execution of the project. This Initiative will be coordinated with other members and observers of the Regional Collaboration through periodic briefings at meetings of existing Great Lakes regional organizations.

7. **Status.**

a. At its first conference call on September 25, the Steering Committee adopted a charter and initiated review of the work plan which should be finalized at the next meeting on October 23.

b. The Project Delivery Team, which is responsible for the execution of the project, has had several conference calls, adopted a project budget, and is preparing for an in-person meeting.

c. The Habitat Initiative will conduct a workshop on November 3 in cooperation with the Wetlands Committee of the Interagency Task Force during the State of the Lakes Ecosystem Conference (SOLEC) in Milwaukee, WI. The workshop will include presentations on the scope and products of the Initiative, status to date, provide an opportunity for feedback from interested stakeholders.

8. **Point of Contact.** Mr. Mike Greer, Buffalo District, (716) 879-4229, michael.j.greer@usace.army.mil